

PEACE

Finding stillness in busy/ stressful times

- The service outline below is a guide, which you can adapt in any way you wish.
- **The sections in dark blue comprise an outline lasting about 10 minutes. Sections in light green can be added for a longer version.**
- Introductions to each section may be spoken by the leader or by different members of the group.
- Please feel free to adapt them so that they are natural to what you would say.
- Text in *italics* represent instructional text for you, all other text are the words to be spoken.
- The participants' version is a separate document. You are welcome to print it off and give each person a copy, and/or use the PowerPoint slides if you have projection facilities.
- Participants will be most helped if your words **are spoken slowly**.
- **Don't forget to review how it went afterwards.** Take five minutes to ask: what went well? What could we do better next time? Do this on your own or with others who help you.

Coming together in peace

Welcome people by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

A Welcome to Soulspace. Our theme is peace.

As we come together let us take a moment to be still.

Some of us may come feeling a bit stressed; maybe the week you've have had so far isn't what you'd planned or hoped for.

Some of us may come feeling a bit sad; maybe this week you've experienced a loss, or been reminded of something or someone you've lost.

Some of us may come feeling angry; perhaps you come here off the back of an argument or having been let down by someone you love.

Some of us may be here feeling distracted; maybe you want to get away quickly so you can get on to the thing you really want to be doing.

Some of us may come at the end of our strength, tired and lost as to know how you can sum up the will to move forward.

You're here now and this is a time to pause and breathe.

The feelings we come here with will be very real; they may even be feelings we need to feel; but now is a time to rest and gather what we need to carry on.

OR

- B** Welcome. In this session we will be looking at finding peace, and what true peace looks like. Please feel free to join in however you feel comfortable. You can talk, or not talk. Share, or not share. Use this time to relax, make space, and explore.

OR

- C** Welcome.

You are here among friends.

God's door is open to all.

The great spiritual leader, Jesus, welcomed everyone, the children, the sick, the beggars and the powerful, even the thief on the cross next to him as he went to his death.

Matthew wrote one of the earliest biographies of Jesus.

He describes Jesus saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11. 28)

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Encourage people to connect. Here are three examples, which you can accompany with a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists').

Option 1 *Invite stillness by adapting one of the following or by making up your own. Speak the words slowly.*

- A** Take a moment to pause and look at someone here with you. Gently notice how their presence invites you to slow down. Ask quietly: in what ways does their presence bring calm and stillness to me? Look at their posture, the expression on their face, maybe the clothes they are wearing. Perhaps think of their character. How do these bring restfulness to me, serenity even? Be thankful for the peace the person brings.

OR

- B** Soften your gaze and think about the people who bring you peace, both those in the room and elsewhere. You might want to find a spot on the floor to focus your thoughts. Perhaps give thanks for the peaceful people in your life, or give thanks that you are here with others thinking of peaceful people together.

OR

- C** Jesus, in one of his world-famous teachings, said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27) Imagine that God is in front of you. He gently breathes his peace over you. Feel the warmth of his love. Let that love bring you to a place of stillness and rest.

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Option 2 *Light a candle. As you or another person does so, adapt one of the following or make up your own.*

A As you gaze at the candle's flame, notice its steadiness.

The flame dances, yet it remains unwavering in its glow. Let this remind you that even in the movement and activity of life, you can find a steady core of stillness within.

Breathe deeply, and allow this inner stillness to take root in your heart. As you breathe in, picture the light growing brighter, filling you with peace. As you breathe out, let go of all that weighs on you.

Sit with the flame, allowing your breath and its glow to become one steady rhythm.

OR

B Candles often help us to feel peaceful as they bring both light and comfort. They also help us to focus. As we focus on the flame in front of us, may we become filled with peace. Think about what else gives you peace, and dwell on it for a few moments.

OR

C As we light our candle:

Notice that the flame dances, yet remains unwavering in its glow. Let the steadiness of the light steady your thoughts and feelings.

One of ancient Israel's poets wrote, "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

As you reflect on the steadiness of the candle, consider the peace that comes from trusting in God's steadiness.

In the world around us there is chaos, but we are called to a place of stillness in God.

Where do you need peace in your life today?

Let that peace surround you as you rest in God.

OR

D *Your own words.*

Option 3 *A breathing exercise. Adapt one of the following or make up your own.*

A Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor, your hands resting on your lap, and your eyes lowered or closed. Let us now invite peace into our lives.

We start by taking a few deep breaths, becoming aware of the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe in and breathe out.

As you breathe in, imagine peace filling your body, starting from your feet and slowly rising up. Pause and feel the peace.

Let us do this several times....

(Leave time for people to do this.)

Now as you breathe out, feel any tension or stress leaving your body.

Let us do this several times: Breathe in peace, breathe out stress.

(Leave time for people to do this.)

Now, with each breath, slowly bring your awareness to different parts of your body: your legs, torso, arms, and face. Let your breath bring stillness to each area.

Do this for as long as feels comfortable.

(Leave time for people to do this.)

Now let's bring this exercise to a close, open our eyes when you are ready, and become aware of others in the group.

OR

- B** Take a moment to soften your gaze. Become more aware of your body and take a few seconds to become more comfortable. Feel free to move to another spot in the room or to a different position if it helps.

Take a breath in, perhaps counting to eight in your head as you do so. Then breathe out for eight counts (or for as long as is comfortable).

Let any tension go as you breathe out.

Recognize how deeply you are breathing. Imagine your breaths coming in and out, like a tide upon the shore. Let the rhythm of it lull you into a peaceful space.

OR

- C** You may want to close or lower your eyes.

Get comfortable, take a deep breath, and relax your shoulders as you breathe out.

As you breathe out, let go of all that is causing you stress, feel it leave you as you slowly let go of the air in your lungs.

Hold for a moment before breathing in. Feel the stillness in your body.

Then allow the air in slowly. As you breathe in welcome the comforting spirit of God in place of the stress.

If it helps, say these words quietly, to accompany your breathing in and out: "Breathe in the stillness of God." "Breathe out the unease I feel."

Repeat this six times or for however long is comfortable, then return your breathing to normal.

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Shared reflection

Adapt one of the following or make up your own.

- A** As we draw this exercise to a close, how did you find it? Was it easy? Was it hard? Did you feel a sense of calm? Or did you become anxious that you weren't doing it right? Any of these reactions are OK. And please don't feel you have to share.

OR

- B** We now have a time to share some of your reflections if you would like to. There is no pressure to say anything and there are no right or wrong answers. You may like to sum up your reflection in just one or two words. For example, I felt...*(leader supplies their own example)*.

OR

- C** I wonder what stood out for you in this exercise?

Did you find yourself feeling a bit calmer and more peaceful?

Or did you struggle, for example with wandering thoughts? (Many people do.)

Did any thoughts come to you that you would like to share with others in the group? (Don't feel you have to.)

Is this sort of thing already part of your daily life? Or might you include it in your life?

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Finding peace

Choose from one of the following.

Option 1 A reading from the Bible

Select from:

A This reading from Isaiah 40: 28–31.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. The Lord will not grow tired or weary, and God's understanding no one can fathom. God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

OR

B Select a reading from those offered on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Bible readings').

Introduce the reading by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

We shall now have a reading from one of the world's most famous spiritual books, the Christian Bible. I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, "What is this reading saying to me?"

OR

C This reading comes from a book of challenges and promises in the Bible. The book is named after someone called Isaiah, who was trusted by God to share his word. In this passage, Isaiah shares about who God is in order to encourage God's people and bring them peace. (*Provide your own wording for alternative readings.*) I shall read it through twice. Feel free to just listen to it the first time. Then I will read an explanation (*provide your own*) and read the passage again. Perhaps you can think about what images or pictures the reading brings to mind.

OR

D We shall now have a reading from the Bible. I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, "What is this reading saying to me?"

OR

D Your own words.

Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the reading, then continue to the next section, "Bringing peace to the world".

If you sense people would like to discuss the passage, you can choose from the questions in the 'Discussing the Bible Readings' download on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').

Option 2 Reflecting on a picture

Instead of the reading, you can reflect on a picture. To avoid copyright issues, try the [Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#) websites, which have photos you can download for free. The photo used in the sample material is taken by Cathy Myers from the national Church of England. You can replace it with a different photo if you wish.

Invite people to consider one or two questions as they look at the photo. You can choose from the following:

- What is the piece doing? Does it tell a story? Evoke a feeling? Document an event? Present an idea? If so, what? Does it speak of peace in any way?
- How does it make you feel?
- Are there aspects that make you feel more peaceful?
- Does the piece bring to mind any of your own life events or memories, especially ones that brought you peace at the time or do so now?
- Does the photo connect you to something greater (maybe the source of peace)? If so, in what ways?
- How have your feelings changed from the time you started looking at it till now?

Introduce this section by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

- A** The photo you see (on your sheet or on the screen) is taken by (Cathy Myers).

We are going to reflect silently now on the photo, and as you do so, you may want to ask yourself (choose one or two questions from the above).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like to.



OR

- B** Spend time looking at this photo. Perhaps think about how this photo makes you feel, and whether it conveys a sense of peace. There are no wrong answers; what does it make you think of? You might like to write down some thoughts either on the photo itself or around the border. You can use just one word if you like.

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like to.

OR

- C** We are going now to look quietly at a photo. Sometimes photos can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or for God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we look at this photo, you may want to ask yourself (choose from the above questions).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like to.

OR

- D** Your own words.

Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the photo, then either continue to the next section, “Bringing peace to the world”, or carry on with the option in light green below if you’re having a longer session.

After the silent reflection, adapt one of the following:

- A** I wonder if anyone has any thoughts they would like to share? Have you noticed things that bring stillness or make you feel more peaceful?

OR

- B** Give each person a copy of the photo and then say: If you feel comfortable, place your photo (with your written thoughts on it) on the floor and gather round to see how other people have responded. If you would rather not share your reflections, that is fine; just fold your photo in half to indicate this.

OR

- C** I wonder what you have noticed in this photo. Are there things that bring you feelings of peace and stillness? I'd now like to share this quote by Leonard Bernstein.

"Stillness is our most intense mode of action. It is in our moments of deep quiet that is born every idea, emotion, and drive which we eventually honor with the name of action. We reach highest in meditation, and farthest in prayer. In stillness every human being is great."

OR

- D** Your own words.

Option 3 Reflecting on a poem

The poem is written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. You are welcome to give each person a copy. It can either be read out loud by yourself or someone else in the group, or it can be read silently. Introduce the poem by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

- A** We are going to reflect silently now on a poem, "The sound of sheer silence," written by a chaplain, Mark Berry. You may want to focus on an image or phrase and ask why it strikes you.

At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

OR

- B** We are now going to read through (part of) a poem twice. It is called "The sound of sheer silence" and is written by Mark Berry, who works for the church. As you listen, perhaps see if one or two things speak to you and what they might be saying. You don't have to think about this too much; go with your gut reaction and don't stress about coming up with the perfect answer. Think about what speaks to you and why.

At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

OR

- C** We are going now to reflect quietly on a poem, "The sound of sheer silence," written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. Sometimes poems can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we think about this poem, you may want to focus on a phrase, an image or an idea.

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like to.

OR

- D** Your own words.

The poem: The sound of sheer silence

The sound of sheer silence,
 Fights to be heard amongst the clatter and clamor,
 Still the battering fears,
 The questions that scream,
 The anguish that points and pokes,
 And tries to suffocate my space,
 Doubts that roar in the tumultuous wind,
 Accusations that pierce my awareness fired by the storm,
 Insecurities crashing in my head in the fall of a great river,
 In the noise I hear no voice but my own,
 My weak voice, my raw voice, my tired voice.
 My voice bringing me down, destroying my
 confidence, prodding my wounds.

Stand, still.

Stand, still.

Stand, still.

Do not hear the storm, the wind, the rain.

Hear instead the sound of sheer silence.

Hear the voice in peace,

Hear the voice of peace,

Hear the voice... peace.

Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the poem, then continue to the next section, “Bringing peace to the world”, or carry on with the option below if you’re having a longer session.

After the silent reflection, adapt one of the following:

A I wonder if anyone has any thoughts about the poem they would like to share?

Were there any images, phrases or ideas that struck you?

What emotions did you have as you read/listened to the poem?

Were there any words or phrases that surprised you?

OR

B We now have time for you to share some of your reflections, if you would like to. There is no pressure to say anything and there are no right answers. You may want to write down some of your thoughts before we start. (*Short time of silence.*) Would anyone like to share a thought, word, or idea?

OR

C I wonder what reactions you had to this poem?

Did you think about it in relation to God? Or in relation to a friend, family member or someone who is close to you?

Were there any images, phrases or ideas that you relate to most?

Did this poem remind you of any personal experiences or feelings?

If you could ask the poet (Mark) one question about the poem, what would it be?

OR

D Your own words.

Bringing peace to the world

This section follows the reading, photo or poem. If you want some music to accompany it, you can play a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists').

Adapt one of the following or make up your own:

A We now have a short time of silence when you can think about an item in the news, a person you are concerned about, or a situation you face. You can send peace to the situation through positive thoughts, or ask God as you understand God to bring peace to the people you have in mind.

OR

B Think about or write down three recent times when you have felt peaceful and what helped you feel this way. This might be people, hobbies, or something that you think of as divine. (*Period of short silence.*) Now write down or think about some ways that you could bring peace to other people.

OR

C If God exists and was here with us, what situation or person would you ask God to bring peace to? We'll have a few moments of quiet while you think about this, and then an opportunity to share your thoughts if you would like to. **(At the end, if appropriate, you could ask people to say a collective 'Amen'.)**

OR

D Your own words.

To bring this section to a close, use the following prayer. You may want to ask people to say the words in bold together.

God who wants us to know peace,

Help us to help each other in our moments of struggle and tiredness.

Help us to trust each other and be honest,

when we feel we need to put on a brave face.

Help us to welcome times of rest when our ego is telling us to stop is weakness. Help us to let go of the stubbornness of trying to do everything on our own. Help us to find moments of stillness and breath in the urgency of modern life. Help us to allow you to share our burdens and take the weight off our shoulders. Lift our hearts when they start to drop.

Hold us up when we start to flag,

and find ourselves drained by all that we see around us.

Help us to place our hope in you and your promises.

Teach us to rest, trusting you to renew our strength.

May we know what it is to walk with you, step by step, day by day.

May we know your love and your peace even when we feel we cannot go on.



Conclusion

Use one of the following:

A We conclude our time with a poem:

May peace flow through you,
Soft as a whisper, strong as a tide.
May your mind find rest
And spark a new stillness deep inside.
May you bring calm to
Troubled lives, wherever and with whomever you abide.
We say together, **Amen**.

OR

B Focus on one or two things that have spoken to you from this session. Hold them in your mind for a few moments. You might like to think about them over the next few days. We give thanks for the time we have spent together, for the thoughts we have had, and for the peace that we leave with.

OR

C We conclude this time together with a short prayer.

Loving God, please grant us peace of mind and calm us when our hearts are troubled. Give us the strength and clarity of mind to find our purpose, and walk the path you've laid before us.
May each day contain the rest and the nourishment we need to keep us growing and moving forward in a healthy way.
May we know your love and your peace each day until we meet again.
Together, **Amen**

OR

D Your own words.

Too much silence?

The shorter version will be largely silent, with the option of accompanying music. If people would like more time to talk, you could:

- Use some of the discussion questions with the reading in the **Discussing the Bible Readings download on the Church Support Hub** (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').
- Allow time for reactions to the photo or poem, as suggested in the light green sections.
- Invite other members of the group to read the poem and the prayers (if you use them).